



BluegrassBeacon BY JIM WATERS

Talk of ‘symbolic’ votes casts real doubt on economic recovery

By Jim Waters

Almost before senator-elect Rand Paul finished reminding us in his victory speech Tuesday about Thomas Jefferson’s admonition that “government is best that governs least, and freedom is best when enjoyed by the most,” some prognosticators in the GOP establishment were busy trying to lower expectations about corralling the federal health-care beast known as [“Obamacare.”](#)

They seem to think that a sure-to-come vote to repeal the controversial policy is important only in a “symbolic” way.

But such a vote would be much more than “symbolic” for America’s small business owners trying to stay afloat in this murky economy.

Nelson County’s Charles Howard and his wife mortgaged their home 26 years ago in order to build a 1,236-foot square hardware store. Howard’s business and thousands of small businesses — less than 10 employees — depend on real action, not symbolism.

His company, Howard’s Metal Sales, located in Chaplin, used to employ six. Now it’s five. Laying off employees is not “symbolic.”

And he’s put a previously planned expansion on hold. There’s nothing “symbolic” about slow business growth.

“I’m not about to create a new job,” he said. “I have to have insurance. I have two kids — 13 and 15 years old. You can bet I’m going to bankroll every penny to make sure I can cover out-of-pocket expenses.”

Members of the out-of-touch GOP hierarchy in Governmentland might have the luxury of casting “symbolic” votes. Howard and the rest of Kentucky’s small business owners cannot endure that luxury.

The \$10,000 increase in health-insurance premiums staring him in the face for the next year is Howard’s first contact with “Obamacare.” It’s not a symbolic tab. It’s a very real 38-percent increase.

“Who can stand that?” Howard said. “What kind of company can stand that? Nothing else has gone up 38 percent in the past year that I’ve thought of.”

Being forced to increase his policy deductible from \$500 to \$5,000 is not “symbolic,” either — especially if there’s a serious illness involved.

No, Howard’s ability to keep his business open is not “symbolic” to him. It’s not “symbolic” to America’s economy either.

The Department of Commerce reports small businesses created 9.8 million of the 15 million net new jobs produced in America since 1993. That’s 65 percent of all new jobs.

So, economic recovery could in fact remain “symbolic” if policies like “Obamacare” continue to beleaguer small businesses.

And it doesn’t appear that voters will just be satisfied with “symbolic” votes with no substantive action, either. Politicians who supported the federal health care fiasco were soundly defeated on Election Day.

There’s nothing “symbolic” about the voter tsunami that just occurred.

Those in Congress who support the economically cancerous federal health care plan still retain the ability to filibuster, and the president likely will veto any attempt to repeal the entire plan.

However, bold steps can and must be taken.

“Republicans must do more than hold a symbolic vote in favor of repeal and then forget about it,” said Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute. “There are numerous incremental steps they can take — from de-funding portions of the law to attacking unpopular provisions.”

David Boaz, Tanner’s boss, offers specifics: “The House should refuse to appropriate money to implement the bill’s provisions and prohibit the Department of Health and Human Services from spending any money to implement the bill’s worst provisions — especially the individual mandate.”

This divided-government thing could be good for America.

While politicians clash over which, if any, parts of “Obamacare” to keep, they could be too busy fighting with each other to raise our taxes, pass [cap-and-trade](#) and enact more of the kind of regulations that put the Charles Howards of the world out of business.

— *Jim Waters is vice president of policy and communications for the Bluegrass Institute, Kentucky’s free-market think tank. Reach him at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com. Read previously published columns at www.bipps.org.*